What We Learned at EAB:
Key Insights from Our First Week as a Remote Firm
Our First Week

The swift transition to remote work required individuals to become comfortable with virtual meeting technology, managing remote staff, and holding themselves and direct reports accountable with little oversight. Connecting with other team members remains invaluable to knowledge-sharing across silos and departments. Our Learning & Development team met with over 60 team members here at EAB during our first week as a fully remote firm to share best practices in navigating this challenging time.

Turning your video camera on during virtual meetings spurs engagement.

The Learning & Development team heard from 26 managers across the firm during our Manager Connection Roundtables and many surfaced the same challenge: persuading their team members to use their video cameras during virtual meetings.

Managers raised that when some individuals on their team hesitated to turn on their video, their direct reports and peers often didn’t turn on their video either. Lack of face-to-face interaction – even video-based interaction - makes communication, holding reports accountable, and engaging team members that much more challenging in today’s remote-only work environment.

Set shared expectations about video camera use

To combat any hesitation with using video cameras during virtual meetings, our Learning & Development team recommends:

• Setting the expectation with all participants before meetings that cameras must be turned on during meetings except when there’s major distractions (e.g.s., kids, delivery people) in the background.

• Encouraging team members to “come as they are” to meetings - people may be in workout attire, household members may walk by the camera, someone may be concerned their space is untidy. All of that is okay. Remind team members that we are all navigating similar challenges and that their on-camera participation is still valuable.

• Starting every meeting by setting shared expectations for virtual participation, including that cameras be on and waiting for participants to turn on their videos before working through the meeting agenda.

Meeting preparation is even more important in virtual settings.

During our first week of fully-remote work, many team members experienced an uptick in the number of meetings on their calendar. Managers, direct reports, and colleagues all desired face-to-face interactions to ensure accountability and reduce interruptions in existing workflows.

To ensure meetings run as efficiently as possible, block out time on your calendar to prepare for each large meeting (e.g., team- and department-wide meetings, formal trainings, meetings on critical topics).

Ensure meeting efficiency by preparing appropriately

• Define a clear agenda for the meeting and draft complementary talking points.

• Ensure content is participatory. Even a typical workstream pull-up or department-wide meeting can have interactive elements. Create thoughtful discussion questions, activities (e.g.s., icebreakers, break-outs by team) or other participatory elements (e.g., a poll) for each part of your agenda.

• Identify a co-leader or point-person for your meeting. Ask someone to help you think through your agenda or activities ahead of time and identify a moderator to help monitor the chat and nonverbal feedback options (especially if you’re leading a large meeting).

• Set up a conference line ahead of time and enable participation options. Avoid using your personal conference line and instead schedule a conference line specifically for your meeting.

• Remind attendees of expectations and the agenda prior to the meeting. Send a reminder email to attendees with the agenda, expectations for participation, any materials to reference during the meeting, and conference line information at least four hours ahead of time or the day prior.
During challenging global events, individuals may feel like they lack control over any part of their lives. Creating a simple structure around the workday, similar to the structure one creates when going physically into the office, can help individuals maintain productivity and control over their workstreams. We met with 23 EAB team members to learn how they stay productive and they passed along some great tips.

Workday structures and routines drive productivity

- Develop a morning routine to get yourself mentally ready. Our team members have created morning routines that include making their bed, changing out of pajamas, enjoying breakfast or a morning beverage of choice, meditating, or playing with their pets or children before work. After they complete their morning routine, they feel ready to tackle the day’s challenges.

- Pre-schedule blocks throughout your day and add them to your calendar to ensure you’re getting mental and physical breaks during the workday. Get up out of your workspace, do a lap around your apartment or home, refill your water bottle, and eat a meal or snack to stay productive over the course of your day.

- Set daily priorities or make a list of each task you want to accomplish on a daily basis. Some team members find it helpful to schedule work blocks on their calendars to work on one specific task on their list, while others prefer to keep their schedule open and workstreams flexible.